

## **South Central Region Fishing Forecast**

### **Lafayette County**

#### **Yellowstone Lake**

Already abundant with channel catfish, walleye, crappies, bluegill, and largemouth bass, this lake now sustains a fishable population of smallmouth bass averaging 13 inches with fish up to 18 inches. Most abundant in the lake are crappies and walleye. Walleye 15 to 18 inches comprised 42 percent of walleye sampled in 2005, with 34 percent greater than 18 inches. The 2002 year-class of crappies still supports a tremendous number of fish averaging 9 inches. Yellowstone Lake also maintains a low-density, high-quality northern pike and musky fishery.

#### **Steiner Branch**

This small 4.25 mile stream contains the only fishable brook trout population in Lafayette County and contains brown trout as well. Brook trout are now responding to habitat work completed along a 1.25 mile stretch in 2003, showing an increase in adult fish and natural reproduction. Establishment of this brook trout population is ongoing with more trout habitat work scheduled and a catch-and-release status at this time.

#### **Pecatonica River and East Branch Pecatonica River**

Even with manure-related fish kills in 2004, this river system continues to produce one of the better channel catfish fisheries in south central Wisconsin. Channel catfish in the 19- to 23-inch range are abundant with some fish up to 30 inches. Flathead catfish are also present with some measuring 42 inches. We have tagged 875 channel catfish along with 44 flathead catfish. Anglers catching a tagged fish are asked to record the tag number, date of catch, length of fish, and location caught and call (608) 935-1935 or send to the fisheries staff at the Dodgeville Service Center, 1500 N. Johns St., Dodgeville, WI, 53533. These river systems also offer anglers the opportunity to pursue walleye and smallmouth bass.

### **Iowa County**

#### **Ley Creek**

Ley Creek supports a mixed brown trout / brook trout fishery with an estimated 200 adult fish per mile (pre-habitat work). Brown trout are most abundant and range from 5 to 16 inches. Brook trout are located in its upper portions and range from 5 to 12 inches. About 3,800 feet of trout habitat work was completed on the lower half of the public fishing easements in 2005. Bank shaping, rip-rap, LUNKERS, and wedge dams have increased the holding areas for trout along this small stream. It may take two years for overall numbers of adult fish to increase in the project area, but it only took two months for the fish now there to utilize the new structures. Habitat work is scheduled to continue for an additional 3,400 feet. Public fishing easements are located along the project area.

#### **Gordon Creek**

With just over four miles of public fishing easement, Gordon Creek supports one of the better brown trout fisheries south of Route 18. We have estimated 1,800 brown trout per mile of all sizes from surveys conducted in 2005. With brown trout over 20 inches present, the creek offers anglers the opportunity to catch trophy size fish as well. Habitat improvement projects are scheduled to begin in 2006. Catch-and-release as well as harvest areas are located on Gordon Creek.

### **Grant County**

#### **Trout streams**

Surveys conducted in 2005 along portions of the Grant and Little Grant river systems reveal that both have an estimated brown trout population of 600 trout per mile. Both also offer anglers the opportunity

of trophy fish, with brown trout over 20 inches present. Other streams of interest that anglers may want to try are Borah Creek, McPherson Branch, and the Rountree Branch – all of which have an established brown trout population with public access available.

### **Smallmouth bass streams**

Environmental conditions in 2005 proved to foster another good reproductive year for smallmouth bass in Grant County. Surveys conducted in the Platte and Grant River basins turned up many young-of-the-year smallmouth bass. Combined with the good year-class of 2003, the 2005 year-class has anglers looking forward to the 2007 and 2008 fishing seasons. There are still many opportunities for anglers to catch smallmouth 12 to 17 inches. Some streams anglers may want to take a look at include Blockhouse Creek, Rattlesnake Creek, Platte River system, and the Grant River system. Remember that landowner permission is required before walking along stream banks where there are no public fishing easements. – *Bradd Sims, fisheries biologist, Dodgeville*

### **Dane County**

The Madison, or Yahara lakes, offer anglers a “one-stop” fishing experience as home to a suite of high quality game and panfish opportunities. Highlights from the 2005 field sampling season follow.

#### **Wingra Lake**

The muskellunge population is estimated at 753 fish, or 2.18 adult (over 30 inches) fish per acre. Compared to other “good” musky lakes, this is anywhere between two to four times the average standing stock. We saw relatively good numbers of 9-inch white crappies. Panfish remain numerous but small. Bass numbers are low and size distribution on the small side.

#### **Monona Lake**

Our musky population survey in 2004 estimated densities of 0.49 adult fish per acre. Average size and condition are excellent: an average Monona musky is 36 inches and weighs 13 pounds. Bass numbers are highest of any lake on chain: we see fish to 20.3 inches with 14 percent of all largemouth larger than legal size. Walleye are the Monona “sleeper” -- the average fish shocked was 16.4 inches and 62 percent of all fish we shock are legal. Bluegill numbers are very high – the catch rate is 265 fish per hour, compared to 52 per hour on neighboring Mendota. We had a very strong year-class of ‘gills this last year. Perch averaged 7 inches but 20 percent of the catch exceeded 9 inches long with fish up to 10.2 inches. Northern pike were found up to 38 inches long in fall 2005 sampling.

#### **Mendota Lake**

Walleye stocks showed both excellent young-of-year survival (23 percent) and a high percentage (19 percent) of fish greater than 18 inches. Catch rates were 33 fish per hour, consistent with the four-year average. The largemouth bass sample was dominated by 50 percent of the catch being young-of-the-year or fish less than 7 inches. Fall bluegill samples were inconclusive and non-representative.

#### **Lake Waubesa**

Bass catches remain strong with fish up to 21.2 inches. The proportion of fish greater than 14 inches (legal size) continues to hover at about 11 percent. Walleye catches were modest, with an average size of 15.3 inches. Fish ranged from 9.3 to 20.6 inches. Fifty percent of all walleye were greater than 15 inches. Panfish were numerous but small.

**Lake Kegonsa** – A very dominant year-class of yellow bass was evident. Largemouth bass were prolific, especially at the Yahara River mouth and up to AB bridge: 348 bass were sampled and only 8 percent were legal-sized or larger. The largest bass was 17.6 inches. Bluegill catch rates were 108 fish per hour, fair to good numbers-wise. Fish were measured up to 9.3 inches. Kegonsa had the best

quality, size-wise, of the lakes' samples for panfish. Walleye catches were fair at best, with mostly small fish encountered. However, the 2005 sample excluded the north shore due to weather and this area traditionally provides the best walleye habitat on the lake.

### **Fish Lake**

The most recent survey, 2003, found a good opportunity to catch and release bass under the 18-inch size limit. Abundant milfoil beds allow bluegills to hide from predators, thus they are abundant but don't grow to quality size, although a fair number of 7-inch fish exist. Carp are abundant and nutrient levels from agricultural runoff over the years have decreased water quality. Mud Lake, connected by a road culvert, was noted to contain good populations of quality-size yellow bullheads and 7-9 inch crappie.

### **Trout streams**

Fly, spinner, and bait anglers have a lot to choose from in western Dane county. Streams range from small, fast running streams to slower, deep waters that hold some truly large fish. Perennial favorites for wild fish include Black Earth Creek, Mt. Vernon Creek, and portions of Garfoot and Deer creeks. Newly rehabilitated waters where extensive habitat work was completed include the West Branch Sugar River, Primrose Branch, and German Valley Creek. Dane County also hosts pond and lake fishing opportunities at Stewart Park Lake near Mt. Horeb, Token Creek Pond east of Waunakee, Salmo Pond near Black Earth, and the Kyle and Jenny ponds in Fitchburg.

Dane County streams grass up early, making summer fishing more challenging as vegetation drapes the watercourses. Recent bank work has created more fishable conditions by removing invasive box-elder and woody vegetation.

The focus is on producing wild fish by creating in-stream habitat that supports spawning, nursery, and over- winter cover. Fisheries staff stock modest numbers of fingerling trout to supplement natural reproduction in most waters. Yearling domestic strain trout are stocked on popular waters where fishing pressure is heavy.

Dane County experienced at least two run-off related fish kills on trout water since fall 2004. Fisheries management is actively involved in finding solutions to balance the public trust in high quality fisheries with our agricultural heritage.

New maps showing both DNR ownership and public easement along Dane county streams are available from the South Central Regional Office. – *Kurt Welke, fisheries biologist, Fitchburg*

### **Southwest Wisconsin trout streams**

The fishing forecast for trout in southwest Wisconsin for trout is nothing short of fantastic. Almost the entire trout fishery is now a wild trout fishery and most of the streams contain multiple year-classes of fish. Growth rates have remained good, and because of the significant number of older fish, most streams now contain significant numbers of medium to larger trout. A number of shocker surveys of the catch-and-release streams and stream segments found across the board outstanding trout populations even late in the season. Wild populations are significantly different than the historic, planted, domestic populations. There's significantly more of these fish in the streams throughout the entire season but they are significantly more wary than their domestic cousins and require more skill to catch. Also, because these trout are predisposed to survive and reproduce in the wild, they have a thinner, racier build as well as a smaller ultimate size. The adult wild brown trout average 10 to 13

inches with big trout measuring 14, 15 or 16 inches and trophies measuring 17 or 18 inches. Wild trout greater than 18 inches are very scarce.

### **Lower Wisconsin River**

The walleye population has seen a significant increase in 15- to 18-inch fish resulting from protection afforded by the newly established 18-inch size limit. A fair increase in the number of 19-inch and larger fish has also been noted in the surveys. In particular, anglers report the number of medium, and to some extent, larger walleye caught downstream has improved significantly. Channel catfish are currently in good shape. The smallmouth bass population has a good number of fish with a number of medium and larger fish. Almost all of the bass anglers practice catch-and-release almost exclusively and the population is improving to reflect this practice. There was a great hatch of smallmouth bass this year in the river, and while this won't affect the 2006 fishery, it bodes well for future fishing. There are also decent populations of bluegills and crappie located in the river's quiet still water areas.

### **Iowa County**

#### **Blackhawk Lake**

The largemouth bass population of Blackhawk Lake has responded positively to the special no size limit regulation that has been in effect for the past couple of years. The overpopulation of medium bass has been reduced and the current population still consists of good numbers but the fish are much heavier for their body length and there are more large fish. The crappie population remains in pretty good shape for number and size distribution. The population of large bluegills has passed out of the system, replaced by very large numbers of smaller fish. The bait shop, anglers and a co-op DNR project has led to purchasing large young-of-year walleye and stocking them in the lake. A pretty decent bonus walleye population is developing.

#### **Cox Hollow Lake**

The special no size limit regulation in effect for the past couple of years has eliminated the severely stunted population of bass, however, the bluegill fishery remains dominated by medium and larger fish with only limited number of smaller fish. The liberal bass regulation will remain in effect until the number of smaller fish dramatically improves. An experimental DNR program to evaluate the success of stocking large instead of small young-of-year (YOY) walleye has been completed. Stocking large YOY resulted in a significant population of walleye, which never developed when smaller YOY walleyes were stocked. These fish have not made the legal-size limit yet but are surviving well and growing at a modest rate.

#### **Twin Valley Lake**

This lake has really seen improvement in the overall quality of its fishery in recent years as result of a number of intensive management efforts. The lake currently has a large population of medium to medium-small bluegill and crappies and there is no limit on harvest in any one day. The largemouth bass population is in excellent shape for numbers and size structure, with the number of large fish increasing every year. The lake has a limited but fair population of walleye of all sizes that have resulted from large YOY walleye being stocked instead of small YOY. The number of musky stocked has been reduced and significant amounts of musky forage have been planted, resulting in more normal catch rates and fish in much better condition and heavier bodied. While not a producer of trophy musky, the number of 36- to 40-inch fish is outstanding for a small lake. – *Gene Van Dyck, fisheries biologist, Dodgeville*

## **Columbia County**

### **Lake Wisconsin/Wisconsin River**

Fall 2005 surveys show below-average year-class production for both walleye and sauger. For walleye, it's been 1997 since a major year-class occurred. Sauger have been more stable but less numerous. The positive news for 2006 is a good number of legal-size fish (15 to 19 inches) present, possibly because of lower than normal harvest in 2005. Late ice out prevented angling on the spawning run leaving the lake, and poor catchability of fish after early June in the lake. A very large year-class of shad occurred in 2005 and may have kept walleye well-fed, but the shad population has suffered a typical, late November kill. Thus, the walleye may be more eager to bite in 2006. A record number per mile of fish over 20 inches was also observed, likely aided by the protected 20- to 28-inch no-harvest slot rule. Most of these fish are from low level year-classes. Largemouth and smallmouth bass populations continue to look good and large bluegill are definitely present in the lake, indicating they are not overharvested. A good white bass year-class was noted. Crappie abundance has never regained the level of 10 to 15 years ago, but large fish are present. Musky stocking occurs in alternate years and 50-inch fish are occasionally caught.

A fall population estimate of 238 legal size lake sturgeon was determined below the Sauk Dam. With 75 fish harvested during the fall hook and line season, the 30 percent harvest rate was well above the 5 percent rate considered sustainable.

### **Lake Columbia**

The annual late fall survey of this 500-acre "hot tub" found the fishery in good shape. Largemouth bass of 14 to 17 inches are at a record high with bass over the 18-inch size limit about average. Though power generation has increased, causing the lake temperature to be warmer for a longer period, smallmouth bass continue to maintain a presence. Annual hybrid striped bass stocking is funded by Alliant Energy and fish of all sizes continue to be present. The largest sample this year was 27 inches and 9 pounds. Channel catfish numbers are down about 50 percent over the past few years, possibly due to increasing numbers of flatheads, ranging up to 40 inches.

### **Swan and Park lakes**

These two upper impoundments of the Fox River continue to be plagued by overabundant gizzard shad. Superstocking of walleye in Park Lake has been tried for the past three years, but the young shad outgrow young walleye during the first year, so predation is not effective until walleye reach year two. The once abundant aquatic vegetation with its excellent bluegill and bass fishery has been replaced by shad and current populations of stocked walleye and northern pike. Nutrient runoff from the watershed over the years is to blame.

The shad in Swan Lake out-compete stocked walleye fry for zooplankton so we switched to small fingerling stocking. These walleye have been noted to survive better and will provide a continued walleye fishery. Largemouth and smallmouth bass, crappie, bluegill, yellow bass and catfish round out the fishery.

## **Sauk County**

### **Devils Lake**

The two-story brown trout fishery continues to grow in popularity. About 15 percent of the catch is comprised of 2-year-old trout (14 to 17 inches). Stocked at 9 inches in April, they grew to 12 inches the following fall. Many anglers are enjoying ice fishing for the trout using fathead minnows. The lake touts a trophy northern pike fishery with its 32-inch size limit. Largemouth, smallmouth bass and jumbo bluegills are also present. Only electric motors are allowed.

DNR has been operating a 24-inch siphon for the past three years to withdraw phosphorus from the lake bed before the lake turns over in the fall. Over 10 to 15 years, the goal is to return the lake to a more pristine state, which will be most noticeable to lake users by less filamentous algae and increased water clarity. Slower fish growth will likely be a trade-off.

### **Lake Redstone**

Crappie fishing is popular during the spawning period. Walleye stocking continues to fuel a quality fishery. Good numbers up to 20 inches are noted. Smallmouth bass stocking in 1998 and 1999 by a local club has now established a natural reproducing population. The lake has also become known for musky with several legal fish noted. Good size structure of largemouth bass, channel catfish and bluegill round out the fishery.

### **White Mound Lake**

A draw down during winter 2003-04 to remove sediment in the two bays will optimize bass predation as the dredging will reduce milfoil vegetation which provided hiding cover for small bluegills. It is on its way to returning to its quality bluegill status of the 1990s. The next fishery survey will occur in fall 2006.

### **Lake Virginia**

A drawdown during fall and winter 2003-04 to allow for replacement of the outlet structure led to compaction of sediment, which should help reduce the dense vegetation for a while. Restocking with bass and bluegill occurred during 2004 and the fishery is developing as scheduled. The Lake District installed a new aeration system, which should prevent any future fish kills.

### **Mirror Lake**

The 137-acre state park impoundment continues to support an excellent largemouth bass population. Native northern pike are also present and a stocked walleye fishery exists. Bluegill, black crappie and yellow perch provide plenty of action as well.

### **Lake Delton**

Excellent fishing is found when boating and other water activity on this Lake Delton playground tapers off in the fall or early spring and during early morning and evening. A good largemouth bass population, stocked walleye and spillover northern pike from Mirror Lake offer outstanding action. The lake has shad forage, which allows for good growth. Bluegill, crappie and yellow bass provide panfishing.

### **Sauk and Columbia county trout streams**

The stocking of wild strain trout has been documented to provide two to three times better survival in trout streams. About 80 percent of the streams are stocked. The better streams in Columbia County are Rowan, Rocky Run, Jennings and Lodi, while in Sauk County, try Dell, Rowley and Manley for native brookies. Recent habitat work has been conducted on Honey Creek in western Sauk County and is showing good response.

### **Kids Fishing Ponds**

During late May and early June the following ponds receive a planting of panfish by local sportsmen's clubs. Try Plenke Pond in Reedsburg, Deppe Pond in Baraboo and Pauquette Pond at Portage. Fishing clinics and contests are offered by local clubs. – *Tim Larson, fisheries biologist, Poynette*

## **Dodge County**

### **Beaver Dam Lake**

Spring fyke netting conducted in 2005 indicates that the size distribution of walleye has shifted with several additional year classes present under the new 18-inch minimum length limit/three fish daily bag. Growth rates of walleye continue to be good for southern Wisconsin, with females reaching 18 inches in an average of five years, and males in seven years. DNR stocked 1,870,000 walleye fry into Beaver Dam Lake in 2005. The majority (74 percent) of bluegill sampled during 2005 spring fyke netting were 7 to 8 inches, while 95 percent of yellow perch sampled were between 7.5 and 10 inches.

### **Fox Lake**

Walleye catch rates for 2005 fall electrofishing were 86.5 per hour, comparable to 2004 rates. The number of young-of-the-year (YOY) walleye under 10 inches was 5.3 per hour, a drop from 11.5 per hour in 2004. In 2005, DNR stocked 129,850 small fingerling walleye into Fox Lake. Catch rates of largemouth bass were much higher (87.4 per hour) than in 2004, due to the abundance of small bass, most likely due to the spawning and rearing habitat provided by the abundant growth of submerged aquatic plants in summer 2005. The lake also experienced clearer water in summer 2005, aiding development of the excellent plant habitat. Anglers should continue to experience good crappie fishing on Fox Lake, with 2005 fall electrofishing sampling black crappies up to 12 inches. The majority of yellow perch measured during fall electrofishing were 7 to 8 inches, and 43 percent of bluegill measured were 5 to 6 inches.

## **Jefferson County**

### **Rock Lake**

Fall electrofishing in 2005 produced largemouth bass up to 16.5 inches and smallmouth bass up to 16.4 inches. Despite the stocking of 499,200 walleye fry in 2005, the walleye population continues to struggle, with fall electrofishing catch rates remaining consistently low at 4.2 per hour, and fish ranging from 7.8 to 20.4 inches. Bluegills up to 9.2 inches and yellow perch up to 10.4 inches were sampled. Rock bass were the second-most abundant panfish species, at 53 fish per hour and up to 11.5 inches.

### **Rock River (Jefferson and Dodge counties)**

In November 2005, a fish passage structure was installed at the Jefferson Dam in the City of Jefferson. The goal is to allow game and non-game fish species upstream and downstream navigation of the Rock River. The fish passage will improve movement, reproduction and recruitment of fish species, such as sauger and walleye, by providing uninterrupted river access from the Indianford dam at Lake Koshkonong to the lower Watertown dam.

The fish passage design is similar to an existing structure located on the Fox River at Eureka. It consists of a series of horizontally elongated steps filled with rock. Each step provides a gentle slope that reduces water velocity so that fish are able to navigate upstream. Pools and eddies are also included to provide resting spots for fish as they travel upstream. Water flowing over the dam and down the ladder stimulates fish to continue to pass up and over each step.

Funding for the project was obtained primarily through federal grants, including the Wildlife Habitat Improvement Program through the Natural Resource Conservation Service, National Fish Passage program through the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, Environmental Protection Agency Section 319 Program funds, DNR Environmental Damage Compensation account, and DNR Bureau of Fisheries and Habitat Protection Program segregated funds.

DNR fisheries biologists are researching fish movement within the Rock River system as a whole as well as in relation to the new fish passage. Tags used in the study resemble 2-inch, fluorescent pink pieces of spaghetti and are located near the base of the fish's dorsal fin, the fin along the top of the back. Each tag has a unique serial number stamped on it that identifies that fish and an address to send the tag to.

Anglers should report tagged fish, along with catch date and location, tag number, length, whether the fish was kept or released, and angler's name and address to the address on the tag or (920) 387-7876.

Anglers are asked to **not** remove tags from fish they release. - *Laura Stremick-Thompson, fisheries biologist, Horicon*